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ABSTRACT

This packet of materials addresses teacher and parent strategies for teaching reading to children with learning disabilities. A brochure addresses the importance of reading and the widespread phenomenon of reading difficulties and offers a list of additional resources. Five pamphlets include: (1) "Principles for Learning To Read: Essential Skills for Children with Learning Disabilities," which describes 10 skills needed for reading; (2) "Reading: The First Chapter in Education," which describes the challenges of illiteracy and lack of phonemic awareness and proposes solutions for the classroom; (3) "Tips for Parents," which outlines what parents can do to improve their child's reading; (4) "Tips for Teachers: Teaching Reading to Children with Learning Disabilities"; and (5) "Researchers as Resources," which describes the Researchers as Resources on Reading Network and lists affiliated researchers. Reprints of the following articles on reading are included: "Shakespeare and Beginning Reading: 'The Readiness Is All'" (Edward J. Kameenui) and "Learning To Read: Schooling's First Mission" (Elizabeth McPike). Also provided are a resource guide for 1996-1997, which includes information on reading instruction, and a professional development calendar. Contains 26 references. (RC)

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Learning to Read

Reading to Learn

Helping Children With Learning Disabilities To Succeed

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information kit

EC 304 983

READING: THE FIRST CHAPTER IN EDUCATION

Learning to Read

Reading to Learn

Reading: The First Chapter in Education

No other skill taught in school and learned by school children is more important than reading. It is the gateway to all other knowledge. If children do not learn to read efficiently, the path is blocked to every subject they encounter in their school years.

The past five years have brought major breakthroughs in our knowledge of how children learn to read and why so many fail. These new insights have been translated into techniques for teaching reading to beginning readers, including the many students who would otherwise encounter difficulties in mastering this fundamental skill. Researchers have come to appreciate that early identification and treatment of such students can make all the difference. Researchers have also documented the problems — personal, social, and educational — that too often result when early attention and intervention do not occur.

Reading to Learn

Students who do not "learn to read" during the first three years of school experience enormous difficulty when they are subsequently asked to "read to learn." Teaching students to read by the end of third grade is the single most important task assigned to elementary schools. During the first three years of schooling, students "learn to read." That is, they develop the capacity to interpret the written symbols for the oral language that they have been hearing since birth. Starting in fourth grade, schooling takes on a very different purpose, one that in many ways is more complex and demanding of higher-order thinking skills. If efficient reading skills are not developed by this time, the English language, history, mathematics, current events, and the rich tapestries of literature and science become inaccessible.

In addition, a strong body of evidence shows that most students who fall behind in reading skills never catch up with their peers become fluent readers. They fall further and further behind in school, become frustrated, and drop out at much higher rates than their classmates. They find it difficult to obtain rewarding employment and are effectively prevented from drawing on the power of education to improve and enrich their lives. Researchers speak of this syndrome as the "Matthew Effect" — the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Most Americans know how central reading is to education. According to a 1994 poll conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the American Federation of Teachers and the Chrysler Corporation, nearly 70 percent of teachers believe that reading is the "most important" skill for children to learn. Two years earlier, the same polling firm reported that 62 percent of parents believed that reading was one of the most important skills for their children to master. Both teachers and parents ranked reading as more critical than mathematics and computer skills. In other words, there is general agreement among researchers and the public that all children must learn to read early in their academic careers.

The Challenges of Illiteracy

More students fail to learn to read by the end of the third grade than many people imagine. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that all schools encounter students who fall into this category and that all schools should have plans for addressing the special needs of these students.

In its 1994 Reading Assessment, the National Assessment of Education Progress

Reading: The First Chapter in Education

(NAEP), a federally supported program that tracks the performance of American students in core academic subjects, reported that more than four out of 10 fourth-graders (42 percent) in American schools were reading at a "below basic" level. This means that they could not understand "uncomplicated narratives and high-interest informative texts." NAEP also reported that such illiteracy persists in the higher grades. The report found that nearly one-third (31 percent) of eighth-graders and nearly one-third (30 percent) of twelfth-graders are also reading at a "below basic" level. The latter figures probably understate the problem, because many poor readers drop out of school before twelfth grade.

Other researchers have come to similar conclusions regarding how widespread students' reading problems really are. National longitudinal studies have measured the ability of children to recognize individual words in text. Their data suggest that more than one child in six (17.5 percent) will encounter a problem in learning to read during the crucial first three years of school. Further evidence comes from the sharp rise in the number of students who are diagnosed as learning disabled or are referred to special education because they cannot read at the proper grade level.

In contrast to popular belief, reading failure is not concentrated among particular types of schools or among specific groups of students. To the contrary, students who have difficulty reading represent a virtual cross-section of American children. They include rich and poor, male and female, rural and urban, and public and private school children in all sections of the country. According to the NAEP assessment, for example, nearly one-third (32 percent) of fourth graders whose parents graduated from college are reading at the "below basic" level.

In short, the failure of a substantial number of students to learn to read during the critical first three years of school is a national problem — one that confronts every community and every school in the country.

A Common Stumbling Block: Phonemic Awareness

Whatever the reason children fail to read by the end of the third grade, most non-readers share a common problem. They have not developed the capacity to recognize what reading experts call phonemes. Phonemes are the smallest units of speech — the basic building blocks of speaking and writing. The word "cat," for example, contains three phonemes — the /k/, /a/, and /t/ sounds. Phonemes are often identical to individual letters, but not always. The word "ox," for example, has two letters but three phonemes — the /o/, /k/, and /s/ sounds.

Researchers have demonstrated that accomplished readers are adept at recognizing phonemes and putting them together to construct words and phrases. They do this quickly, accurately, and automatically. The absence of this critical linguistic skill makes it difficult for children to decode and read single words, much less sentences, paragraphs, and whole stories. Teaching phonemic awareness and discrimination among phonemes is imperative for all students.

Reading: The First Chapter in Education

Solutions in the Classroom

Teaching beginners to read must be highly purposeful and strategic. Effective techniques have been developed for helping students, including those with learning disabilities, to develop phonological awareness, word recognition, and other advanced skills required for reading.

Phonological awareness activities build on and enhance children's experiences with written (e.g., print awareness) and spoken language (e.g., playing with words). A beginning reader with successful phonological awareness and knowledge of letters ostensibly learns how words are represented in print.

Intervention for learners who have difficulty with phonological awareness must be early, strategic, systematic, and carefully designed. It must be based on a curriculum that recognizes and balances the importance of both phonics instruction and the appreciation of meaning.

For children who have difficulty reading, effective reading instruction strategies should be used to build phonological awareness and alphabetic understanding. These strategies should be explicit, making phonemes prominent in children's attention and perception. For example, teachers can model specific sounds and in turn ask the children to produce the sounds. In addition, opportunities to engage in phonological awareness activities should be plentiful, frequent, and fun.

Instructional strategies should consider the characteristics that make a word easier or more difficult to read. These include: the number of phonemes in the word; phoneme position in words (initial sounds are easier); phonological properties of words (e.g., continuants, such as /m/, are easier than stop sounds, such as /t/); and phonological awareness dimensions, including blending sounds, segmenting words, and rhyming.

Many early readers will require greater teacher assistance and support. Using a research-based strategy known as scaffolding, teachers should provide students with lots of instructional support in the beginning stages of reading instruction, and gradually reduce the support as students learn more about reading skills. The ultimate goal is for students to read on their own without the help of a teacher.

A Balanced Approach

Unfortunately, it is not always easy for teachers to recognize students with reading difficulties. When they do, teachers sometimes find themselves caught between conflicting schools of thought about how to treat reading disabilities. One school of thought gives considerable attention to the teaching of phonics in the early stages of reading. Another school of thought emphasizes the whole language approach. Should teachers rely on phonics instruction, whole language instruction, or a combination of the two?

The U.S. Department of Education and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) have supported the review of hundreds of studies done in recent years on reading instruction and disabilities. This body of research suggests that the relatively recent swing away from phonics instruction to a singular whole language approach is making it more difficult to lift children with learning disabilities out of the downward learning spiral and, in fact, may impede the progress of many students in learning to read with ease.

Reading: The First Chapter in Education

Few dispute the value of giving children opportunities to write, surrounding children with good literature, and generally creating a rich literate environment for students. But for many children this is not enough. Such children will have continued difficulty with reading unless they master the decoding skills associated with phonics instruction.

Research makes clear that children do not learn to read the way they learn to talk. Speech is a natural human capacity, and learning to talk requires little more than exposure and opportunity. In contrast, written language is an artifact, a human invention, and reading is not a skill that can be acquired through immersion alone. Beginning readers benefit from instruction that helps them understand that the words they speak and hear can be represented by written symbols — and that letters and the sounds associated with them, when combined and recombined, form words — just as they benefit from experiences that make reading fun.

California's experience with a chosen reading approach is instructive. A decade ago, the state became a leader in the movement to embrace whole language instruction. However, as a result of low reading scores, a task force was formed and has recently adopted a more balanced reading approach that includes building phonological awareness along with the reading of meaningful and engaging texts.

Research indicates that reading can be taught effectively with a balanced approach that uses the best of both teaching approaches. Such an approach incorporates phonics instruction with the rich literacy environments advocated by whole language instruction.

The Learning to Read/Reading to Learn Initiative

Throughout the Learning to Read/Reading to Learn: Helping Children with Learning Disabilities to Succeed initative, three leading researchers in the field of reading instruction, Marilyn Jager Adams, author of Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print, a book supported by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI); Ed Kameenui of the University of Oregon, a researcher supported by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP); and Reid Lyon of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) have identified what they believe are the most important strategies for improving early reading instruction. These strategies are effective for virtually every child but are absolutely critical for children with learning disabilities. By evaluating the ways in which students learn to read, researchers have identified nine skills essential to the learning process. Identification of these skills will alert teachers and parents to ways in which they can help children learn to read more efficiently.

Reading: The Key to Success

As already discussed, reading is the gateway to learning. Facility to understand and use written language has always been a prerequisite to the efficient acquisition of knowledge, and it is becoming increasingly important in today's information society. In the past, it may have been possible for persons who were illiterate to obtain a good job, support a family, and live a comfortable life, but those days are gone. Children who do not learn to read today can expect to live on the margins of society in every way. Universal literacy is the ultimate "access" issue in American education.

Reading: The First Chapter in Education

American schools thus face a new and monumental challenge. For the first time, educators are being asked to bring all students to a level of performance that was demanded of only a relatively few students in the past. Educational and political leaders understand this challenge, and a major effort is underway to raise the standard of teaching and learning in American schools. Improved reading instruction is crucial to this process. Attainment of the National Education Goals by the year 2000 will require enhanced reading skills in American students. Developments such as national standards in core subjects, new forms of accountability, or decentralization of school management will have few positive effects in the absence of well-conceived reading instruction.

Attaining such goals also means that ways must be found to address the learning needs of those students who, for whatever reasons, face difficulties in learning to read. Doing so is not only a matter of equity; it is also a practical necessity if the overall objectives of improving American education as a whole are to be met.

Not only are American schools facing new demands, they also are being asked to deliver more education without the addition of substantial new resources. Thus they must become more efficient. Incorporating the new knowledge we now possess about reading and how to teach it is imperative if schools are to use their resources effectively and efficiently. All students must start reading as soon as they are developmentally ready to do so, and they must build on basic reading skills as they move into higher grades. In the absence of such orderly progression, schools are put in a position of having too many children in remedial or special education programs.

Toward a Nation of Readers

We are living at a pivotal time in the history of American education. More than ever before, schools are being asked to deliver a higher level of education and to do so for all students. Meeting this challenge requires that the process of "learning to read" be securely underway for virtually all students by the end of the third grade.

No American school would knowingly withhold a vaccine from students that would prevent a childhood disease like measles. Yet this is, in effect, what is happening when it comes to the teaching of reading. Recent gains in our knowledge of the reading process have given us the tools to help the majority of students, including those with learning disabilities, to learn to read at the level required to function as effective individuals, workers, parents, and citizens in today's world. The challenge is to put this new knowledge in the hands of teachers, parents, and school administrators so that millions of American students who otherwise would fail to learn to read will gain access to this important skill.

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PRINCIPLES FOR LEARNING TO READ

Learning
to
Read

**Reading
to
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Principles for Learning to Read:

Create Appreciation of the Written Word

Long before children are able to engage in reading themselves, they must feel that reading is something they would like to do. They must develop an appreciation of the pleasures of written language and of the many ways language is useful.

Develop Awareness of Printed Language

Children need to develop a basic sense of what print looks like and how it works. They must learn how to handle a book, which way to turn the pages, and that the printed words — not the pictures — tells the story when you read. Children should be taught that words are all around them — in newspapers, mail, billboards, signs, and labels — and have many different and valuable purposes.

Learn the Alphabet

Comfortable and early familiarity with letters is critical for learning to read. Children should learn the names of letters and to recognize and form their corresponding shapes.

Understand the Relation of Letters and Words

Children need to learn that printed words are made up of ordered strings of letters, read left to right. They should be helped to understand that when the combination or order of letters is changed, the word that is spelled also changes.

Understand That Language is Made of Words, Syllables, and Phonemes

The ability to think about words as a sequence of phonemes is essential to learning how to read an alphabetic language. Children should become aware of the building blocks of spoken language. They need to understand that sentences are made up of strings of separate words. They should become comfortable in hearing and creating rhymes. They should be led to play with the sounds of language until they can pull words apart into syllables, and pull syllables into individual phonemes.*

Learn Letter Sounds

Given a comfortable familiarity with letters and an awareness of the sounds of phonemes, children are ready to learn about letter-sound correspondence. The most important goal at this first stage is to help children understand that the logic of the alphabetic writing system is built on these correspondences.

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* A phoneme is the smallest functional unit of speech. (The word "cat" contains three phonemes: the /k/, /a/, and /t/ sounds. Letters often represent more than one phoneme — the a in "cat" is a different sound than the a in "cake" — and sometimes a single letter will contain more than one phoneme. For example, the word "ox" has two letters but three phonemes, /o/, /k/ and /s/). Fluent readers learn to recognize these discrete sounds of spoken words quickly, accurately, and automatically. Phonemic awareness is the foundation on which all other reading skills are built.

Principles for Learning to Read:

Sound Out New Words

As children learn specific letter-sound correspondences, they should be challenged to use this knowledge to sound out new words in reading and writing. Making a habit of sounding out unfamiliar words contributes strongly to reading growth, not just for beginners, but for all readers. Children need to understand that sounding out new words can actually be a strategy for helping them unlock pronunciations of words they have never seen before, and can make what they are reading understandable.

Identify Words in Print Accurately and Easily

The ability to read with fluency and comprehension depends on recognizing most words almost instantly and effortlessly. Once the framework for a new word or spelling has been laid, through sounding and blending, the key to recognizing it quickly and easily is practice. The most useful practice is reading and rereading of meaningful text made up of words the child has been taught to sound out. For beginners, such reading helps most if it is relatively easy. As a rule of thumb, no more than one in 20 words should cause trouble.

Know Spelling Patterns

As children become reasonably capable of sounding out words in reading and spelling, it is important that they notice the similarities in their spellings. Awareness of spelling patterns that recur across words hastens progress in reading and writing, and weak knowledge of spelling is an impediment to mature readers.

Learn to Read Reflectively

Although the ability to sound out words is essential for learning to read, it is not enough. Written language is not just speech written down. Instead, text brings new vocabulary, new language patterns, new thoughts, and new modes of thinking. To enjoy and profit from reading, children must also learn to take the time to reflect on these aspects of text.

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Learning
to
Read

**Reading
to
Learn**

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Tips for Teachers:

Reading is the single most important educational skill your students will learn. Understanding the organization and meaning of text and instruction in both phonics and literature is essential to helping young children read. By understanding the prerequisite skills for reading, teachers can build a solid foundation for their students to learn and succeed in school.

Create Appreciation of the Written Word

- Share stories with children and invite them to explore a story's magic.
- Share informational texts and invite children to wonder about the new ideas presented.
- Take every opportunity to point out the ways in which reading is essential to the communications of everyday life (e.g., on labels, instructions, and signs).

Develop Awareness of Printed Language and the Writing System

- Make sure students know how books are organized. They should be taught the basics about books--that they are read from left to right and top to bottom, that print may be accompanied by pictures or graphics, that the pages are numbered, and that the purpose of reading is to gain meaning from the text and understand ideas that words convey.
- Read to children from books with easy-to-read large print. Use stories that have predictable words in the text.
- Use "big books" to help children notice and learn to recognize words that occur frequently, such as a, the, is, was, and you.
- Label objects in your classroom.

Teach the Alphabet

- A strong predictor of the ease with which a child learns to read is his or her familiarity with letters of the alphabet. This familiarity is a critical building block for learning to read.
- It is important to go beyond knowing the names of letters. Students must also develop a sense of the purpose of letters. Help them notice the letters in the print that surrounds them and that you share with them every day.
- Engage the students in activities that will help them learn to recognize letters visually.
- Help students learn to form the letters and encourage them to embellish their work with their names and with other first attempts at writing.

Develop the Students' Phonological Awareness

- In listening and speaking, we pay attention to the meaning of language rather than to its sound. To learn to read, however, students must be taught to attend to the sounds,

Tips for Teachers:

Tasks Related to Students with Learning Disabilities

or phonology, of language. This is necessary for them to understand how speech is represented by print. Children with learning disabilities need special help in learning to develop such phonological awareness.

•Model and demonstrate how to break short sentences into individual words. For example, use the sentence "Frogs eat bugs," and demonstrate with chips, cards, or other manipulatives how the sentence is made up of three words and how the order of the words matters. Using manipulatives to make sentences, play with each word and put it in order.

•Develop students' awareness of the sounds of individual words by asking them to clap out syllables and to listen for and generate rhymes.

•Once children are comfortable in playing games with words, syllables, and rhymes, move onto phonemic awareness.

Develop Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness refers to an understanding that words and syllables are comprised of a sequence of elementary speech sounds. This understanding is essential to learning to read an alphabetic language. The majority of children with reading disabilities fail to grasp this idea.

•In teaching phonemic awareness, the focus of all activities should be on the sounds of words, not on letters or spellings.

•Use strategies that make phonemes prominent in children's attention and perception. For example, model specific sounds, such as /s/ in the word sat, and ask children to produce each sound in isolation and in many different words until they are comfortable with the sound and understand its nature.

•Begin with simple words and simple challenges, e.g., listen for initial /s/ in sat, sit, sip, and sad . . . or for long /e/ in me, see, bee . . . .

•Teach students to blend phonemes into words. Begin by identifying just one phoneme, e.g., /m/-ilk, /s/-at, working gradually toward blending all the phonemes in words, e.g., /s/-/a/-/t/.

•Teach students to identify the separate phonemes within words, e.g., what is the first sound of soup? What is the last sound of kiss? Beginning phonemes are easier to identify than final phonemes.

•Once students are comfortable listening for individual phonemes, teach them to break up words, into component sounds, e.g., /m/-/oo/-/s/= "moose".

•Create a sequence of segmenting and blending activities to help studenst develop an understanding of the relationship between sounds in words.

•Provide children with more support when first teaching a task. For example, model a sound or strategy for making the sound, and have the children use the strategy to produce the sound. Model and practice several examples. Prompt the children to use the strategy during guided practice, and gradually add more examples. As the students

Tips for Teachers:

Teaching Reading to Students with Learning Disabilities

master these skills, provide less teacher-directed instruction and more practice and challenge.

• Make teaching phonological awareness a top priority. Opportunities to engage in phonological awareness activities should be plentiful, frequent, brief, and fun.

• Phonemic awareness is essential for learning to read, but it is not enough by itself. It must be coupled with instruction and practice in learning the relationship between letters and sounds.

Teach the Relation of Sounds and Letters

• Students should learn the letters of the alphabet and discriminate each letter from the other, because each stands for one or more of the sounds that occur in spoken words.

• When presenting each letter, model its corresponding sound and have children produce the sound themselves. For children with learning disabilities, the teaching activities must be explicit and unambiguous.

• At first, teach and work with only a few letter-sound correspondences that have high utility in many words (e.g., /m/ in man, mad, him, and ham). Postpone teaching less frequently occurring letters until students have a firm understanding of how left-to-right spellings represent first-to-last sounds (alphabetic understanding).

Teach Children How to Sound Out Words

• After students have mastered a few letter-sound correspondences, teach them to decode words or sound them out. Begin with small, familiar words. Teach the children to sound out the letters, left to right, and blend them together, searching for the word in memory.

• Model sounding out the word, blending the sounds together and saying the word. The ability to sound out new words allows children to identify and learn new words on their own.

• Give children stories containing words that reflect the letter-sound patterns that have been taught, and encourage them to sound out words whenever they are uncertain.

• Help children learn spelling conventions, such as the use of final /e/'s to mark long vowels, by comparing and contrasting lots of examples.

Teach Children to Spell Words

• Teach children to spell words by sounding their letters one by one. Model the sounding and spelling process for children as they spell.

• Begin with short words children can sound out, because these words follow regular spelling conventions, e.g., cap, bat, and sit instead of cape, bait or sight.

• Begin with simple words that do not contain consonant blends, e.g., ham and pan instead of slam and plan.

Tips for Teachers:

Linking Reading to Spelling and Writing Practices

- Encourage students to use spelling knowledge and strategies regularly in their own writing.

- Introduce spelling conventions systematically. Begin with words that exemplify the most frequent and basic conventions, and provide support and practice to help students generalize from these words to others. The goal is to help them see the spelling conventions in the words.

- Use words in which letter-sound correspondences represent their most common sounds (e.g., get instead of gem).

- Develop a sequence and schedule of opportunities that allow children to apply and develop facility with sounds and words at their own pace. Specify what skills to assess and when to assess them so that you will know when to move on. Take into account each student's background knowledge and pace in moving from sounding out to blending words to reading connected text.

Help Children Develop Fluent, Reflective Reading

- Help children learn to read fluently by requiring them to read new stories and reread old stories every day.

- Help children extend their experience with the words, language, and ideas in books by interactively reading harder texts with them and to them every day.

- Relate information in books to other events of interest to children, such as holidays, pets, siblings, and games. Engage children in discussion of the topics.

- In both stories and informational texts, encourage wondering. For example, "I wonder what Pooh will do now?" "How do you think the father feels ?" or "I wonder what frogs do in the winter? Do you think that's a problem? Why?"

- Model comprehension strategies and provide students with guided assistance.

- Point out how titles and headings tell what a book is about.

- Help students identify the main ideas presented in the text, as well as the supporting detail. Graphics help to reveal main ideas, and the relationship between text and graphics helps students understand what they are reading.

- Point out unfamiliar words and explore their meaning. Revisit these words frequently and encourage students to use them in their own conversations.

- Show children how to analyze contextual clues to figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word. Research shows that most vocabulary growth comes from learning new words in reading.

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Glossary

Alphabetic awareness - Knowledge of the letters of the alphabet coupled with the understanding that the alphabet represents the sounds of the spoken language.

Alphabetic understanding - The understanding that, in principle, the left-to-right spelling of printed words represents their phonemes from first to last.

Background knowledge - All children bring some level of background knowledge to beginning reading (e.g., how to hold a book, knowledge of words, knowledge of the world). Priming this background knowledge--relating new knowledge to that which is already known--helps children draw on their experiences as a means of understanding new information. When sufficient background knowledge does not exist, it will be necessary to adjust instruction accordingly.

Fluency - The ease with which students translate print to speech.

Phonemes - The elementary speech sounds represented by the letters of a perfect alphabet. In the English alphabet, which is not perfect, some phonemes are represented by combinations of letters (e.g., /th/, /sh/), and some letters represent more than one phoneme (e.g., c, g, a, e, I, o, u).

Phonemic awareness - The awareness that spoken words or syllables can be thought of as a sequence of phonemes. Phonemic awareness is a sub-category of phonological awareness.

Phonological awareness - The ability to attend to the phonological or sound structure of language as distinct from its meaning. Types of phonological awareness include word awareness, syllable awareness, rhyme awareness, and phonemic awareness.

Phonological decoding - Translating the letters or spelling patterns of a written word into speech patterns in order to identify the word and to gain access to its meaning.

Phonological encoding - Writing a letter or word based on its sounds.

Phonological recoding - Translating the spelling of written words into the speech sounds they represent.

Print awareness (orthographic awareness) - Awareness of how print works and how it looks. Print is made up of letters, the letters correspond to sounds and words, and text is read from left to right across the page.

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TIPS FOR PARENTS

Ways to Help Your Child With Learning Disabilities Become a Better Reader

Learning to Read

Reading to Learn

Tips for Parents

Ways to Help Your Child Become a Better Reader

Parents can have a strong positive influence on their child's reading. Research has shown that enjoying books with a child for even a few minutes a day can make a measurable difference in the acquisition of basic reading skills, and that everyday activities — such as a trip to the grocery store — can be turned into enjoyable learning experiences.

Following is a list of ways in which parents can encourage the development of the skills needed by children in order for them to become good readers.

Create Appreciation of the Written Word

• **Find time to read aloud with your child every day.** Typically, parents play an important role in developing this skill by reading to children and showing how important reading is to their daily life. Lap time with picture books and stories can strongly motivate your child to enjoy reading. Try to make these books available for your children to explore and enjoy on their own as well.

Develop Awareness of Printed Language

• **Teach about books.** When reading aloud to your child, let your child open the book and turn the pages. Point to the words as you read. Draw attention to repeated phrases, inviting your child to join in each time they occur.

• **Point out letters and words that you run across in daily life.** Make an obvious effort to read aloud traffic signs, billboards, notices, labels on packages, maps, and phone numbers. Make outings a way to encourage reading by showing your child how printed words relate to daily living.

Learn the Alphabet

• **Play alphabet games.** Sing the alphabet song to help your child learn letters as you play with alphabet books, blocks, and magnetic letters. Recite letters as you go up and down stairs or give pushes on a swing. A-B-C, dot-to-dot and letter-play workbooks, games, and puzzles are available at most toy stores. Many engaging computer games are designed for teaching children letters. Make sure these toys are available even when you are unable to play along.

• **Watch "Sesame Street" with your child.** Show the child how to sing along, answer the riddles, and engage actively in its fun.

• **Make writing materials available to your child and encourage their use.** Help your child learn to write his/her name and other important words or phrases. Gradually, help the child learn to write more and more letters. At first, most children find it easier to write uppercase letters.

Understand the Relation of Letters and Words

• **Teach your child to spell a few special words, such as his/her name, "stop," or "exit."** Challenge the child to read these words every place they are seen. Draw attention to these and other frequently occurring words as you read books with your child. Challenge the child to read these words as they arise or to search them out on

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Tips for Parents

Ways to Help Your Child Become a Better Reader

a page. Play word-building games with letter tiles or magnetic letters. Have the child build strings of letters for you to read.

Understand That Language is Made of Words, Syllables, and Phonemes

• **Sing songs and read rhyming books.** Sing the alphabet with your child, and teach your child songs that emphasize rhyme and alliteration, such as "Willaby Wallaby Woo" and "Down By the Sea." Emphasize the sounds as you sing. Play rhyming games and clap out names. Jumble the wording or word order of familiar poems and challenge your child to detect the error. Talk like a robot, syllable by syllable.

• **Play word games.** Challenge your child to play with words. For example, ask your child to think of words that rhyme with "bat" or begin with /m/. What would be left if you took the /k/ sound out of "cat"? What would you have if you put these sounds together: /p/ and ickle; /m/ and ilk; and /s/, /a/, and /t/. Which of these words starts with a different sound -- "bag", "candy", "bike"? Do "boat" and "baby" start with the same sound?

Learn Letter Sounds

• **Sound out letters.** Point out other words that begin with the same letter as your child's name, drawing attention to the similarities of the begining sound. Use alphabet books, computer games, or car games such as, "I'm thinking of something that starts with /b/" to engage the child in alliterative and letter-sound play. If you have a book that lends itself to alliteration and rhyme, such as a Dr. Seuss book, sound out rhyming words as you read or challenge the child to do so for you. Play word games that connect sounds with syllables and words. For example: If this spells "cat," how do you spell "hat"?

Sound Out New Words

• **Point out new words.** As you encounter them, say the sound while touching each letter in a new word. For example, say "s-u-n" and then blend sounds to create the word. In practicing new words, use predictable words with common sounds and spellings, like "fun" or "sat" instead of "night" or "saw."

If you encounter words with unknown meanings or with complex spellings, encourage your child to try to sound out the words. However, if too many words require this kind of attention and effort, it is best to find an easier book.

• **Play spelling games with your child.** After your child begins pronouncing words, encourage spelling by saying each sound in the words and then writing the letter that goes with the sound.

• **Encourage your child to spell.** After your child has learned to pronounce words, have the child say each sound.

• **Independent writing.** Encourage your child to use inventive or independent spelling. At this stage, the child will tend to omit letters and confuse letter names with letter sounds, producing such spellings as LFNT for elephant, BN for bean, and FARE

Tips for Parents

Ways to Help Your Child Become a Better Reader

for fairy. Use correction wisely. You should be most concerned about is the child's sensitivity to the sounds that need to be represented.

Identify Words in Print Accurately and Easily

• **Help your children to read easy, enjoyable stories as often as possible.** It is likely that your child will enjoy reading more and learn more from reading if you sit together, taking turns reading and encouraging discussion. In the beginning, invite the child to read well-chosen words. Gradually, as the child becomes able, take turns with sentences, speakers, paragraphs, and pages. At the end of each section or story, revisit those words that caused trouble. Rereading the entire story over several days, and again weeks later, is a powerful way to reinforce this learning.

Know Spelling Patterns

• **Now it becomes useful to point out the similarities between words** such as will, fill, and hill or light, night, and sight. This is also the time to help your child learn the correct spelling of the words he/she writes.

Learn to Read Reflectively

• **Pause for discussions as you read.** As you read stories to and with your child, stop frequently to discuss their language, content, and relevance to real life and other knowledge. Pause to explore the meanings of new words, using them in other sentences and contrasting what they mean with words that have similar meanings. Make an effort to revisit new words and concepts later, when the book has been put aside. When reading stories, pause to discuss the various characters, problems, events in the story, and invite your child to think about how the problems might be solved or to wonder about what might happen next. When resuming a story, ask your child to review what has happened so far, drawing attention to looming mysteries and unresolved conflicts. In reading expository text, invite the child to marvel at the creatures or events described and to wonder about details or connections not mentioned by the text.

• **Above all: Read, read, and re-read**

This document was developed by The National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators, as part of cooperative agreement #H180M10006 from the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs. The points of view expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education. We encourage the reproduction and distribution of this publication.

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Glossary

Alphabetic awareness - Knowledge of the letters of the alphabet coupled with the understanding that the alphabet represents the sounds of the spoken language.

Alphabetic understanding - The understanding that, in principle, the left-to-right spelling of printed words represents their phonemes from first to last.

Background knowledge - All children bring some level of background knowledge to beginning reading (e.g., how to hold a book, knowledge of words, knowledge of the world). Priming this background knowledge--relating new knowledge to that which is already known--helps children draw on their experiences as a means of understanding new information. When sufficient background knowledge does not exist, it will be necessary to adjust instruction accordingly.

Fluency - The ease with which students translate print to speech.

Phonemes - The elementary speech sounds represented by the letters of a perfect alphabet. In the English alphabet, which is not perfect, some phonemes are represented by combinations of letters (e.g., /th/, /sh/), and some letters represent more than one phoneme (e.g., c, g, a, e, I, o, u).

Phonemic awareness - The awareness that spoken words or syllables can be thought of as a sequence of phonemes. Phonemic awareness is a sub-category of phonological awareness.

Phonological awareness - The ability to attend to the phonological or sound structure of language as distinct from its meaning. Types of phonological awareness include word awareness, syllable awareness, rhyme awareness, and phonemic awareness.

Phonological decoding - Translating the letters or spelling patterns of a written word into speech patterns in order to identify the word and to gain access to its meaning.

Phonological encoding - Writing a letter or word based on its sounds.

Phonological recoding - Translating the spelling of written words into the speech sounds they represent.

Print awareness (orthographic awareness) - Awareness of how print works and how it looks. Print is made up of letters, the letters correspond to sounds and words, and text is read from left to right across the page.

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RESEARCHERS AS RESOURCES

Learning
to
Read

**Reading
to
Learn**

*Helping Children With
Learning Disabilities To Succeed*

Researchers as Resources on Reading

What is the Researchers as Resources on Reading Network?

The researchers who have agreed to serve as resources are listed in the attached directory called Researchers as Resources on Reading Network. These researchers are experts on the research-based principals of reading instruction and include some of the premier scholars in reading and learning disabilities. All of the researchers have extensive experience working with parents, teachers, and schools to improve reading programs for students with learning disabilities.

What can I expect the researchers to do?

Researchers affiliated with the network anticipate phone calls and other forms of communication from parents and school district personnel who wish to tap the expertise of the network. Limited advice, assistance, and consultation will be provided voluntarily, with more complicated arrangements such as on-site technical assistance to be made solely at the discretion of the researchers and the school. Arrangements for any consultation or technical assistance involving payment are to be negotiated between the researcher and the schools or school districts and will not involve the network. It is important to seek a careful match between your needs and the researcher's expertise and interests. In addition to general expertise in reading instruction, a researcher may have specialized knowledge that can be applied to your specific situation or problems. While specialized knowledge is important, the researcher network does not identify this particular expertise.

How can I work with the researchers?

When you contact a researcher, it is important that you have clearly identified the areas in which you want technical assistance. If you need help in defining your questions, tell the researcher— he or she may be able to assist you in clarifying problem areas that need to be addressed. As you work with the researcher, it is important to continue to identify the important areas to be addressed.

To get the best answers to your reading questions remember to:

- Clearly identify what you want from the researcher, even if it is help in defining your questions;
- Continually check to be sure you are receiving the help you want; and
- Provide the researcher with clear information about the context in which your students will learn to read.

How do I contact members of the network?

You should contact members of the network directly. An office telephone number (O) and a fax number (FX) are listed for each researcher.

Researchers as Resources on Reading

How long will the network be in existence?
The network will exist from July 10, 1996 to July 10, 1997.

Who should I contact for more information about the network?
To obtain more information about the network, contact Jane Burnette at the ERIC/OSEP Special Project, The ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, The Council for Exceptional Children, 703-264-9419. This agency will maintain the Researchers as Resources on Reading Network. However, members' arrangements with schools or districts are at their own discretion and will not involve the network management.

Researchers as Resources on Reading

Marilyn Jager Adams, Ph.D.
BBN Corporation
10 Moulton Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
O- 617-873-3000
F- 617-873-2794

Scott Baker, Ph.D.
University of Oregon
College of Education
233 Education
Eugene, OR 97403
O- 541-346-3541
F- 541-346-5818

William Bursuck, Ph.D.
EPCSE/Special Education
Graham Hall 225
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL 60115
O- 815-753-8441
F- 815-753-9250

David Chard, Ph.D.
Boston University-SED
605 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215
O- 617-353-3253
F- 617-353-3924

Don Crawford, Ph.D.
Department of Special Education
University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire
Eau Claire, WI 54701
O- 715-836-2175
F- 715-836-3162

Shirley Dickson, Ph.D.
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Graham Hall 225
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL 60115
O- 815-753-8422
F- 815-753-9250

Robert Dixon
National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators (NCITE)
2716 Hillside Drive, SE
Olympia, WA 98501
O- 360-754-1122
F- 360-943-7558

Researchers as Resources on Reading

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Southern Connecticut State University
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New Haven, CT 066515
O- 203-392-6406
F- 203-392-5927

Lynn Fuchs, Ph.D.
Professor of Special Education
Peabody College
Vanderbilt University
Nashville, TN 37203
O- 615-343-4782
F- 615-343-1570

Lynn Gelzheiser, Ph.D.
University of Albany, State University of New York
Department of Education, Psychology & Statistics
1400 Washington Avenue
Room ED 222
Albany, NY 12222
O- 518-442-5079
F- 518-442-4953

Mary Gleason, Ph.D.
College of Education
University of Oregon
Room 275
Eugene, OR 97403
O- 541-346-1647
F- 541-346-5818

Cynthia Griffin, Ph.D.
University of Florida
Department of Special Education
G315 Norman Hall
Gainsville, FL 32611
O- 904-392-0701 X.253
F- 904-392-2655

Tracey Hall, Ph.D.
Pennsylvania State University
231 CEDAR Building
University Park, PA 16802
O- 814-863-2400
F- 814-863-1002

Researchers as Resources on Reading

Jan Hasbrouck, Ph.D.
Department of Educational Psychology
Texas A & M
College Station, TX 77843
O- 409-845-2317
F- 409-862-1256

Steve Isaacson, Ph.D.
School of Education
617 S.W. Harrison
Portland State University
Portland, OR 97201
O- 503-725-4493
F- 503-725-5599

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Seattle, WA 98195
O- 206-543-1827
F- 206-543-8480

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F- 541-346-5818

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F- 815-753-9250

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University of Virginia
Department of Special Education
Room 152 Ruffner Hall
405 Emmet Street
Charlottesville, VA 22903
O- 804-924-0759
F- 804-924-0747

Researchers as Resources on Reading

G. Reid Lyon, Ph.D.
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
Room 4B05, 6100 Executive Blvd.
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892
O- 301-496-6591
F- 301-402-2085

Patricia Mathes, Ph.D.
Florida State University
Department of Special Education
205 Stone Building
Tallahassee, FL 32306
O- 904-644-4880
F- 904-644-8715

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University of Pittsburgh
4F29 Forbes Quadrangle
Department of Instruction and Learning
230 South Bouquet Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15206
O- 412-648-2621
F- 412-648-7081

Donna Scanlon, Ph.D.
Child Research Studies Center
Husted Hall
The University at Albany
1400 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12222
O- 518-442-3770
F- 518-442-3746

Jeanne Shay Schumm, Ph.D.
University of Miami
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Office of School Based Research
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Coral Gables, FL 33124
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F- 305-284-6998

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Utah State University
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University at Albany, State University of New York
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Albany, NY 12222
O- 518-442-5106
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Joanna Williams, Ph.D.
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RESOURCE GUIDE 1996-1997

Learning to Read

Reading to Learn

Resource Guide

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Resource Guide

PREFACE

Reading is the most important ability our students will learn, but today many students are failing to acquire this crucial skill. The Learning to Read/Reading to Learn, Helping Children With Learning Disabilities To Succeed effort promotes a strategic approach to teaching reading--one that recognizes the importance of teaching beginning readers the connection between letters and sounds as well as providing literacy instruction. This effort is based on a synthesis of validated and recognized research on teaching reading to children with learning disabilities. Its findings indicate that both phonemic awareness and literacy instruction are essential to learning to read, especially for students with learning disabilities.

To get this information into the hands of those who can act on it -- parents of students who are learning to read and educators at all levels from educational governance to the classroom, major associations and other organizations involved with reading instruction for students with disabilities were invited to be partners in disseminating information. These partners are:

- The American Association of School Administrators
- The American Federation of Teachers*
- The California School Boards Association*
- The Council for Exceptional Children*
- Division for Learning Disabilities, The Council for Exceptional Children*
- The ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education*
- The ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication*
- The International Reading Association*
- The Learning Disabilities Association of America*
- The National Academy of Sciences
- The National Association of Elementary School Principals*
- The National Association For Parents Of The Visually Impaired, Inc.*
- The National Association of State Directors of Special Education*
- The National Black Child Development Institute*
- The National Center for Family Literacy *
- The National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators
- The National Center for Learning Disabilities*
- The National Education Association*
- The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities
- The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
- The National School Boards Association *
- The Orton Dyslexia Society*

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- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Institute on Early Childhood and Development
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Bureau, Administration for Children and Families*
- The Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative

* Participating organizations that have agreed to provide information about this reading research to their members. If you are a member of a listed organization, please inquire within.

For all other inquires contact:

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English and Communication by calling 1-800-925-7853 or by sending e-mail to http:\\www.indiana.edu\~eric_rec
or
ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education by calling 1-800-328-0272 or by sending e-mail to ericec@inet.ed.gov

This Resource Guide lists the relevant publications and 1996 conferences and professional development activities of these organizations, followed by the addresses, telephone numbers, and people to contact in each organization. Like the other documents in the **Learning To Read/ Reading To Learn**, *Helping Children With Learning Disabilities To Succeed* Information Package, users are encouraged to reproduce this document and distribute copies to others who may benefit from it.

Resource Guide

PUBLICATIONS

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC
Phone: 202-879-4561 FAX: 202-879-4537
Contact: Beth Bader
E-mail: bdbader@aol.com
Publications
American Educator issue on reading & packet of information.

California School Boards Association (CSBA)
3100 Beacon Road
West Sacramento, CA 95691
Phone: 916-371-4691 FAX: 916-371-3407
Contact: Diane M. Greene, Assistant Executive Director
E-mail: policy@csba.org
Publications
Every Child Can Read, Every Child Will Read: Who Is Responsible for Ensuring the Literacy of California Students? California School Boards Association Reading Task Force

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091
Phone: 1-800-232-7323 FAX: 703-264-1637
Contact: CEC Publications
E-mail: cecpubs@cec.sped.org
Publications
Teaching Exceptional Children - most issues contain helpful strategies on teaching reading.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091
Phone: 800-328-0272 FAX: 703-620-2521
Contact: Staff
E-mail: ericec@inet.ed.gov
Publications
ERIC Digest No. 540 Beginning Reading and Phonological Awareness for Students with Learning Disabilities
ERIC Digest No. 539 Academic Interventions for Children with Dyslexia Who Have Phonological Core Deficits
Beginning Reading and Students with Learning Disabilities ERIC Minibibliography

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English and Communication
Indiana University
Smith Research Center
2805 East 10th Street, Suite 150
Bloomington, IN 47408-2698
Phone: 800-925-7853 FAX: 812-331-2776
Website: http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec

Resource Guide

Publications

101 Ways to Help Your Child Learn to Read and Write
Help Your Child Read and Succeed: A Parents' Guide
Working with Special Students in English/Language Arts
You Can Help Your Child with Reading and Writing! Ten Fun and Easy Tips (booklet for Parents in English and Spanish)
Linking Reading and Writing (book and audio cassette)
Expanding Your Child's Vocabulary (book and audio cassette)
Parents As Models (book and audio cassette)
Parents As Models Parent Meeting Leader's Guide
¡Leamos/Let's Read (Spanish and English bilingual book for parents)
¡Leamos/Let's Read Parent Meeting Leader's Guide
Connect! How to Get Your Kids to Talk to You
Celebrate Literacy! The Joy of Reading and Writing
Reading Strategies for the Primary Grades
Remedial Reading for Elementary School Students
Beginning Reading Instruction in the United States

Programs

Parents Sharing Books Family Literacy Program
Make Parents Your Partners in Literacy Staff Development Program

Video Tapes

Parents Sharing Books

Hot Topic Professional Guides

Developing Oral Language
Involving Parents in the Reading Process
Guiding At-Risk Students in the Language Arts
Evaluating the Progress of the School Reading Program
What Works? Summary of Research about Teaching Reading
Language Learning and the Young Child
Resources for Home Learning Activities in Language Arts

The International Reading Association (IRA)

800 Barksdale Road
Newark, DE 19714
Phone: 302-731-1600 FAX: 302-731-1057

Contact: Janet Butler (Public information officer)

Books

Practical Steps for Informing Literacy Instruction: A Diagnostic Decision-Making Model, Michael W. Kibby
Single-Subject Experimental Research: Applications for Literacy, Susan B. Neuman
Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print, A Summary Marilyn Jager Adams, Book Author; Steven A. Stahl, Jean Osborn, Fran Lehr, Summary Prepares
Emerging Literacy: Young Children Learn to Read and Write, Dorothy S. Strickland, Lesley Morrow, Editors
Beyond Storybooks: Young Children and the Shared Book Experience, Judith Pollard Slaughter
Book Talk and Beyond: Children and Teachers Respond to Literature, Nancy L. Roser, Miriam G. Martinez, Editors
Tips at Your Fingertips: Teaching Strategies for Adult Literacy Tutors, Ola M. Brown, Editor
Literacy, Home, and School: Research and Practice in Teaching Literacy with Parents, Peter Hannon

Resource Guide

Family Literacy Connections in Schools and Communities, Lesley Mandel Morrow, Editor
Variability Not Disability: Struggling Readers in a Workshop Classroom, Cathy M. Roller

Booklets

How Can I Prepare My Young Child for Reading?, Paula Grinnell
Beginning Literacy and Your Child, Steven B. Silvern, Linda R. Silvern
Creating Readers and Writers, Susan Mandel Glazer
Helping Your Child Become A Reader, Nancy L. Roser
You Can Help Your Young Child with Writing, Marcia Baghban
Encouraging Your Junior High Student to Read, Jamie Myers
Your Child's Vision Is Important, Caroline Beverstock

Videos

Linking Literacy and Play, Kathleen A. Roskos, Carol Vukelich, James F. Christie, Billie J. Eriz, Susan B. Neuman
Reading and Young Children: A Practical Guide for Childcare Providers
Becoming a Family of Readers, Co-produced by Reading Is Fundamental, Inc. and Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc.
Paired Reading: Positive Reading Practice, Produced by the Northern Alberta Reading Specialists Council

The Learning Disabilities Association (LDA)

4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15234
Phone: 412-341-1515 FAX: 412-344-0224
Contact: Jean Peterson (for free information and referral packet)
Website: http://www.vcu.edu/eduweb/

Publications

Students with Learning Disabilities by Cecil Mercer
Educational Care - Mel Levine
Learning Disabilities - Corrine Smith
When Learning is a Problem 1 copy free
Reading Disabilities in College and High School, P. Aaron and C. Baker
The Reading Brain: The Biological Basis of Dyslexia, D. Duane
Reading Problems, Janet Lerner
Learning Disabilities Digest for Literacy Providers, LDA

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)

1615 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-3483
Phone: 703-684-3483 or 1-800-39NAESP FAX: 703-518-6281
Contact: Jim Gandorf, Educational Products Division

Publications

At Home in Our Schools - A Guide to Schoolwide Activities that Build Community in School
Becoming a Nation of Readers: What Principals Can Do

Reproducible Materials

Help Your Child Become a Better Reader

Video Tapes

Little Beginnings in the First Five Years
The Little Things Make a Big Difference

Resource Guide

National Association For Parents Of The Visually Impaired, Inc. (NAPVI)
P.O. Box 317
Watertown, MA 02272-0317
Phone: 800-562-6265 or 1-617-972-7441 FAX: 617-972-7444
Contact: Susan Laventure, Executive Director
Publications
Awareness: NAPVI's quarterly publication
Preschool Learning Activities for the Visually Impaired; A guide for Parents
Children with Visual Impairments; A Parents Guide"; edited by M. Clay Holbrook

National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI)
1023 15th Street, N.W., Suite 600
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202-387-1281 FAX: 202-234-1738
Contact: Sherry C. Deane, Deputy Executive Director
Publications
African American Family Reading List, 2nd Ed.
The Spirit of Excellence Resource Guides for Children:
Children ages 3-7
Children ages 8-11
Youth ages 12-15
Youth ages 16 and older
Young Children and African American Literature

National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators (NCITE)
170 College of Education
1211 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403-1211
Phone: 541-346-1646 FAX: 541-346-5818
E-mail Katie_Tate@ccamail.uoregon.edu
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Publications
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Getting Ready To Read: Learning How Print Maps to Speech, NICHD/Benita Blachman (free)
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Alphabetic Principle and Learning to Read, I.Y. Shankweiler & D. Lieberman
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The State of Science and the Future of Specific Reading Disability, 1996, G.R. Lyon
Learning Disabilities: Past, Present, and Future Perspectives, 1996, G.R. Lyon

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The P Book: Phonological Awareness, A Critical Factor in Dyslexia, Joseph J. Torgeson
All Language and the Creation of Literacy, Sylvia O. Richardson, MD, et.al.
Intimacy with Language - A Forgotten Basic in Teacher Education
Language and the Developing Child, Katrina deHirsch
Reading, Writing, and Speech Problems in Children, Samuel T. Orton
The Many Faces of Dyslexia, Margaret Byrd Rawson

Resource Guide 1996-1997

Date	Event	Location
August 2, 1996	"Make Parents Your Partners in Literacy" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Chicago, IL
August 4-5, 1996	NASDSE Educational Technology Conference and Expo '96 Joan Nelson 703-519-3800 or FAX 703-519-3808	San Francisco, CA
August 19-21, 1996	"IRA: 4th Rupertsland" Regional Conference at Winnipeg Marilyn Raman 204-667-7130	Manitoba, Canada
September 12, 1996	"Parents Sharing Books" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Wichita, KS
September 13, 1996	"Parents Sharing Books" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Takoma, WA
September 13, 1996	"Parents Sharing Books" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Columbus, OH
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September 19, 1996	"Parents Sharing Books" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Des Moines, IA
September 20, 1996	"Make Parents Your Partners in Literacy" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Arlington,TX

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Date	Event	Location
September 20, 1996	"Parents Sharing Books" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Morgantown, WV
September 26-28, 1996	"IRA: 23rd Plains" Regional Conference at Bismark Joyce Hinman 701-258-5384	Bismark, ND
September 27, 1996	"Parents Sharing Books" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Elkhart, IN
September 27, 1996	"Make Parents Your Partners in Literacy" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Little Rock, AK
September 30, 1996	"Parents Sharing Books" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Burbank, CA
October 1, 1996	"Make Parents Your Partners in Literacy" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	San Francisco, CA
October 4, 1996	"Parents Sharing Books" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Kansas City, MO

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Date	Event	Location
October 7, 1996	"Parents Sharing Books" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Minneapolis, MN
October 7-9, 1996	"IRA: 5th Caribbean at Southampton" Regional Conference Juliette Harris 809-293-0266	Bermuda, H.C.
October 8-11, 1996	NBCDI 26th Annual Conference Vicki Pinkston 202-387-1282 or FAX 202-234-1738	New Orleans, LA
October 10, 1996	"Parents Sharing Books" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Montgomery, AL
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Date	Event	Location
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October 29, 1996	"Make Parents Your Partners in Literacy" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Albuquerque, NM
November 1, 1996	"Parents Sharing Books" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Baltimore, MD
November 4, 1996	"Parents Sharing Books" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Charlotte, NC
November 6-9, 1996	The Orton Dyslexia Society National Conference "Literacy: The Trail to Freedom" Cindy Wheeler-Scruggs 410-296-0232 or FAX 410-321-5069	Boston, MA
November 8, 1996	"Parents Sharing Books" Workshop ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English & Communication 1-800-759-4723	Boston, MA
November 17-20, 1996	NASDSE 59th Annual Meeting Joan Nelson 703-519-3800 or FAX 703-519-3808	New Orleans, LA

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April 9-13, 1997	CEC Annual Convention 1-800-486-5773	Salt Lake City, UT
April 12-16, 1997	NAESP Annual Conference "New Directions in School Leadership" Barbara Wilmer 800-386-2377 or FAX 703-518-6281	San Antonio, TX
August 3-9, 1997	NAPVI Conference "Stepping Forward Together; Families and Professionals as Partners in Achieving Education for ALL" NAPVI, Susan Laventure 800-562-6265 or FAX 617-972-7444	Sao Paulo, Brazil
October 22-25, 1997	"IRA: 24th Plains at Omaha" Regional Conference Joanne Carlson 402-333-1892	Omaha, NE
October 30-November 1, 1997	"IRA: 25th Southwest at Tuscon" Regional Conference Gudrum Godare 520-512-3320	Tuscon, AZ

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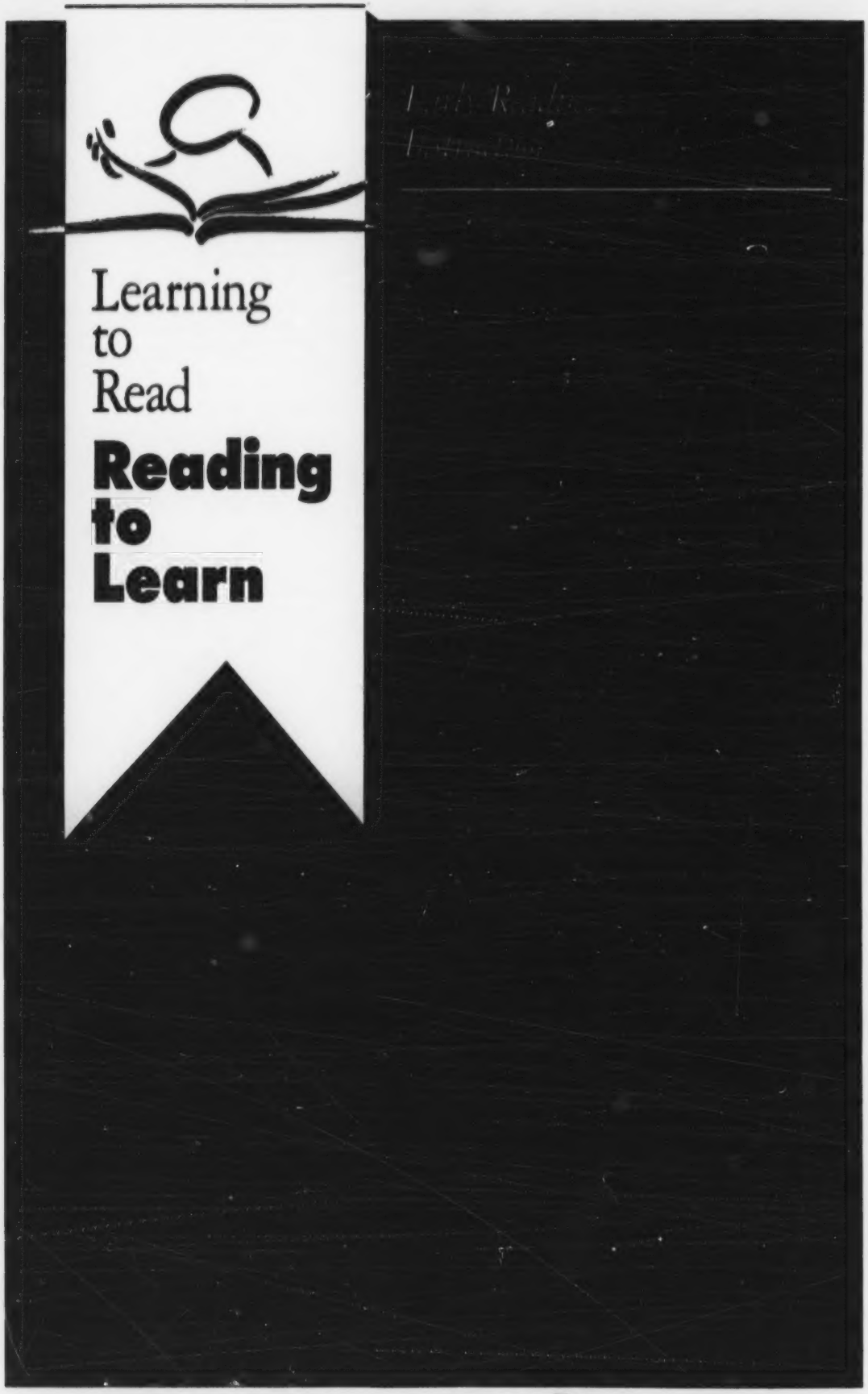

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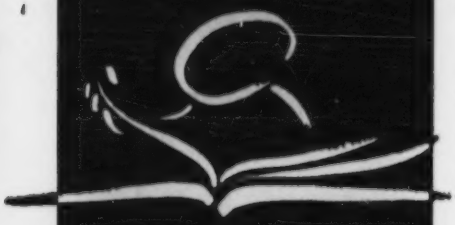

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AMERICAN Educator

LETTERS 2

LEARNING TO READ: SCHOOLING'S FIRST MISSION 3
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■ THE ROLE OF DECODING IN LEARNING TO READ 8
By Isabel L. Beck and Connie Juel
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■ THE MISSING FOUNDATION IN TEACHER EDUCATION 9
By Louisa Cook Moats
How many speech sounds are in the word "ox"? Explain when a "ck" is used in spelling. In a survey of experienced teachers, the author found serious gaps in their knowledge of the structure of written and spoken language. Not surprising, since teacher preparation programs are not teaching it.

TALKING SUBSTANCE 26
By Marcia Reecer
With neither the time needed to get together, nor a common curriculum to focus on, most teachers are left to re-invent the wheel in thousands of separate classrooms. Here are two initiatives that are changing that dynamic.

PRAISE THAT DOESN'T DEMEAN, CRITICISM THAT DOESN'T WOUND 33
By Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish ...
with Lisa Nyberg and Rosalyn Anstine Templeton
Effective feedback is a key part of a teacher's job, but gold stars and "you're the greatest" accolades can't compare with concrete descriptions of what a student has done well ... and of what yet remains to be accomplished.

LEARNING TO READ: SCHOOLING'S FIRST MISSION

THIS WE can say with certainty: If a child in a modern society like ours does not learn to read, he doesn't make it in life. If he doesn't learn to read well enough to comprehend what he is reading, if he doesn't learn to read effortlessly enough to render reading pleasurable, if he doesn't learn to read fluently enough to read broadly and reflectively across all the content areas, his chances for a fulfilling life, by whatever measure—academic success, financial success, the ability to find interesting work, personal autonomy, self-esteem—are practically nil.

Because of the central role that reading ability plays in children's lives, it is in this area, above all others, that the knowledge base for the practice of teaching must be most closely studied and adhered to. There is no room for either confusion or dogmatism. Too much is at stake.

Keith Stanovich, one of the world's leading reading researchers and twice the recipient of the International Reading Association's Albert J. Harris award, has applied the concept of the "Matthew effect" to describe the dramatically different trajectories followed by those children who get off to a good start in reading and those who don't:

> "The term Matthew effects derives from the Gospel according to Matthew: 'For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath' (XXV:29).
>
> "...Put simply, the story goes something like this: Children who begin school with little phonological awareness have trouble acquiring alphabetic coding skill and thus have difficulty recognizing words. Reading for meaning is greatly hindered when children are having too much trouble with word recognition. When word recognition processes demand too much cognitive capacity, fewer cognitive resources are left to allocate to higher-level processes of text integration and comprehension. Trying to read without the cognitive resources to allocate to understanding the meaning of the text is not a rewarding experience. Such unrewarding early reading experiences lead to less involvement in reading-related activities. Lack of exposure and practice on the part of the less-skilled reader further delays the development of automaticity and speed at the word recognition level. Thus reading for meaning is hindered, unrewarding reading experiences multiply, practice is avoided or merely tolerated without real cognitive involvement, and the negative spiral of cumulative disadvantage continues. Troublesome emotional side effects begin to be associated with school experiences, and these become a further hindrance to school achievement.
>
> "Conversely, children who quickly develop decoding processes find reading enjoyable because they can concentrate on the meaning of the text. They read more in school and, of equal importance, reading becomes a self-chosen activity for them. The additional exposure and practice they get further develops their reading abilities. ...(R)eading develops syntactic knowledge, facilitates vocabulary growth, and broadens the general knowledge base. This facilitates the reading of more difficult and interesting texts...."

How many American children are caught in the downward spiral that Stanovich describes? No one has exact figures, but the accumulating evidence—both quantitative and anecdotal—is indeed troubling, and an increasing number of educators are expressing deep concern. Perhaps we need not spend valuable time calculating the precise number of children affected when we know we can say with confidence that we are talking about millions.

The most recent evidence of reading difficulty comes from new studies by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). In April of this year, NAEP announced the latest reading scores for students across the country. Students in three grades in thirty-nine states were tested. Overall, fewer than a third of them were proficient in reading, that is, able to handle challenging texts competently, and only a very few (2 percent to 5 percent depending on the grade) were reading at advanced levels.

While middle-class children and children with normal cognitive development have by no means been spared from the growing incidence of reading problems, the pedagogical clock is ticking most relentlessly for youngsters from low-income and disadvantaged households—those who do not come to school with the thousands of hours of exposure to print and conversation and word play and informal teaching that occurs in most middle-class households: being read to, learning rhymes and songs and playing word-sound

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games, watching and helping as the grocery list is drawn up and checked off, manipulating the magnetic letters on the refrigerator, and so on. In contrast to these fortunate ones, as Marilyn Adams, the co-author of the first article in this special section reminds us, there are children who "have barely even seen a book before entering school."

Also at serious risk, and again the numbers are high, are children whose cognitive architecture—for a wide variety of reasons—makes learning to read and write more difficult.

For these two groups of children in particular, as Adams has so compellingly put it, "we have not a classroom moment to waste."

WHAT DO we know about how best to help children learn to read? The three articles that follow in this special series on learning to read speak with rigor and thoroughness to that question. Let me try to glean five main points that flow from these articles and from other work in the field:

1. Many elements of the Whole Language approach have brought new life to the reading and writing experience and to the classrooms where students and teachers are working creatively together to open the door to full literacy. The early emphasis on writing; the deeper drawing from the rich treasure chest of good children's literature; the freedom for teachers to go beyond tightly regimented and constrained programs and to design a wide range of literacy events and activities; the recognition that prolonged periods of abstracted phonics drill, isolated from meaningful text, is not the way to teach reading; the understanding that learning depends in considerable degree upon capturing a child's interest and engaging his active participation, of setting before him a vision of something he very much wants to be part of: All of these have been invaluable contributions and a much-needed counterbalance to what in many cases was a dry and narrow approach to literacy development. Toward the end of this past school year, we attended my second-grade daughter's "Second Annual Author's Tea" at our neighborhood public school here in the District of Columbia—an event at which the children read from the books they had written, illustrated, and so handsomely bound. The gathering was complete with printed program and the opportunity "to mingle with the authors and enjoy refreshments between readings" (as they say in the fancy bookstores that sponsor more famous, though not more proud and excited authors). As I took it all in, I couldn't help but contrast this experience with the quite different memories I have of my own early reading and writing experiences.

2. Whole Language means different things to different people, and for some educators it has meant combining the types of insights and activities described above with the direct and systematic teaching of all that is involved in mastering the alphabetic code. But many leaders and proponents of the Whole Language approach have so downgraded the importance of code-oriented instruction as to render it but an incidental part of a beginning reading program, if that. Direct instruction and systematic instruction are frowned upon; as is attention to individual words and the letter/sound sub-units of which they are composed. Children are advised to rely on context to figure out unfamiliar words. "Don't sound it out," warns *The Whole Language Teachers Newsletter.* But contextual clues are notoriously unreliable; they can't compete with skilled decoding. And the "wait-for-the-child-to-ask" orientation to decoding instruction doesn't do much for children who don't understand what to ask.

The article that follows by Marilyn Adams and Maggie Bruck will walk carefully and thoroughly through the large body of research on the central role of decoding in reading, but in essence this is their conclusion: To the extent that Whole Language proponents equate learning to read with learning to talk, that is, both "natural" processes to which we are predisposed and that require little more than a rich immersion in order to blossom, they are wrong. To the extent that they minimize the role of skilled decoding in reading comprehension, they are also wrong. And the pedagogical practices that flow from these faulty premises are wrong; indeed for many children they are a disaster. All children can benefit from and many children *require* systematic direct instruction in the elements of the alphabetic code. Each child is different, of course, and some need more extensive instruction in decoding skills than others. But as Keith Stanovich has so succinctly put it:

> "That direct instruction in alphabetic coding facilitates early reading instruction is one of the most well-established conclusions in all of behavioral science.... Conversely, the idea that learning to read is just like learning to speak is accepted by no responsible linguist, psychologist, or cognitive scientist in the research community."

Rather than being irrelevant or incidental to text comprehension, skilled decoding, it turns out, is central. Again, Marilyn Adams:

> "... [I]t has been proven beyond any shade of doubt that skillful readers process virtually each and every word and letter of text as they read. This is extremely counter-intuitive. For sure, skillful readers neither look nor feel as if that's what they do. But that's because they do it so quickly and effortlessly. Almost automatically, with almost no conscious attention whatsoever,

skillful readers recognize words by drawing on deep and ready knowledge of spellings and their connections to speech and meaning.

In fact, the automaticity with which skillful readers recognize words is the key to the whole system.... The reader's attention can be focused on the meaning and message of a text only to the extent that it's free from fussing with the words and letters."

A Whole Language approach that does not incorporate sufficient attention to decoding skills leaves in its wake countless numbers of youngsters who, in the words of one teacher, are surrounded by "beautiful pieces of literature that [they] can't read." As Joanna Williams of Teachers College, Columbia University, has observed: "Today, without strong direct systematic decoding instruction in regular first grade classrooms, more and more children are being shunted into remedial classes, and even special education."

Also left in the wake are many teachers who can see clearly that some of their students are not doing well in a purist Whole Language environment but who are under tremendous pressure from their district or state to minimize the teaching of the alphabetic code. In a recent article in *Education Week*, one veteran teacher describes the environment that followed California's 1987 adoption of a "literature-based framework for teaching language arts" as one in which "officials in some elementary schools seized phonics books and spellers to ensure that teachers were not ignoring the new [whole language] instructional materials."

Pressures are also coming from the social dynamics within the profession. We have heard numerous stories from teachers who, labeled as "old-fashioned" or—worse yet— "resistant to change," have had to "hide their phonics books" or close their doors in order to "sneak in some phonics."

3. Systematic attention to the alphabetic code does not mean a return to the dreariness that characterized so much of the old phonics. Thanks to the dedicated work of many teachers and reading researchers, we now know a lot more than we used to about what constitute the critical elements of decoding and how to go about teaching them. In the second article in this special section, Isabel Beck and Connie Juel offer numerous suggestions for improving existing instructional materials and a variety of strategies and engaging activities that teachers can use to help children master the code. They decry the "drill and more drill" approach to phonics that was once prominent. They describe a scene from the past in which—

"The teacher stands at the front of the class and points with a long wooden pointer to a wall chart that contains columns of letters and letter combinations. As she points to a column of short vowel and consonant *b* combinations, the class responds with the sound of each combination: */ab/, /eb/, /ib/, /ob/, /ub/*. She goes to the next column and the class responds, */bab/, /beb/, /bib/, /bob/, /bub/*. Then the teacher asks, 'What's the rule?' The children respond in unison, 'In a one-syllable word, in which there is a single vowel followed by a consonant....' So it went day after day, with [as P.B. Diederich termed it] 'letter-sound relationships and pronunciation rules...done to death.'"

No wonder, they conclude, many prominent educators referred to this kind of phonics instruction as "heartless drudgery." Those days are over, as they should be, and no reasonable educator is suggesting a return to them. But neither do reasonable educators suggest that students do not need a reasonable amount of well-designed practice.

4. A carefully crafted, balanced approach to the teaching of reading requires considerable sophistication on the part of teachers. Joanna Williams describes the rigorous demands of the job:

"Teachers are often exhorted to be eclectic, as indeed they should be. Teaching children to read requires much knowledge and many skills. Moreover, children do not all respond equally well to the same teaching techniques. A teacher must be ready and able to switch strategies easily. A teacher must be equipped to jump in wherever required and provide appropriate feedback on the spot, whether it be with phonics information, an analogy, or a pointed question. (Of course, he or she must also know when not to jump in but rather let the child find his own way.) Teachers need good training to operate flexibly with multiple strategies and activities. They also need substantial knowledge about the way in which language is structured, particularly with respect to its orthographic and phonological features. They must be able to teach their students about phonemes and how phonemes are represented in writing, and about morphemes (the smallest meaningful units in words) and their spelling patterns...."

But teachers are not receiving this kind of training. The amount of course work in the structure of spoken and written language required by teacher preparation programs and state certification standards are woefully inadequate for the demands of classroom life, particularly classrooms with low-readiness children and a diverse range of learners. In the final article in the series that follows, Louisa Cook Moats reports on a survey she conducted of experienced teachers to assess their knowledge of the structure of spoken and written language. Moats found "pervasive conceptual weaknesses in the very skills that are needed for direct, language-focused reading instruction, such as the ability to count phonemes and to identify phonic relationships. ...Typically, about 10 percent to 20 percent...could consistently identify consonant blends in written words...Less than half of those tested could identify the

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reduced vowel *schwa* consistently. Only 30 percent could explain when *ck* was used in spelling." [See pages 46-47 for the survey and survey results.]

Moats is at pains to point out that teachers cannot be expected to know what they have not been taught, and she urges reform of teacher preparation programs and certification requirements. "At present, motivated teachers are often left to obtain specific skills in teaching phonology, phonetics, orthography, and other language skills on their own by seeking out workshops or specialized instructional manuals."

Moats also notes the terrible toll this takes on teachers. The lack of a firm grasp of the knowledge they need to teach beginning readers—especially hard-to-reach, hard-to-teach children—leaves many dedicated teachers deeply frustrated. Worried that they are not doing a good job, their confidence shaken, many begin to rethink their career choice. Undoubtedly, this is a significant factor in the widely documented high attrition rate of new teachers.

While there are a number of reasons that help explain why teachers are not being offered the training they need, a recent article in *The Atlantic Monthly* may throw some light on the problem: "...in 1987 a survey of forty-three texts used to train teachers of reading found that none advocated systematic phonics instruction—and only nine even mentioned that there was a debate on the issue." Programs that do not believe in the value of systematic phonics are unlikely to provide teachers with the necessary knowledge base in the structure of language. As Moats concludes, "...language mastery is as essential for the literacy teacher as anatomy is for the physician. It is our obligation to enable teachers to acquire it."

5. It is certainly motive enough to know that the lives of millions of children depend on our ability to help them learn to read well. But there may be yet more at stake here. As increasing numbers of parents witness their second and third graders struggling through basic reading materials and lacking command of foundational spelling concepts and spelling-sound relationships, they come to feel that our public schools are failing in their most basic mission. According to a report issued last summer by the Public Agenda Foundation, "First Things First: What Americans Expect from the Public Schools," 60 percent of Americans harbor deep concerns that there is "not enough emphasis on the basics such as reading, writing, and math." Higher standards and more challenging school work are strongly endorsed by the public, but they don't understand how "critical thinking" and "higher-order" skills are possible without mastery of certain basics:

> "In focus groups for this study and other Public Agenda education projects, people express a sense of frustration and even bewilderment at the inability of the public schools to make mastery of the basics commonplace among the nation's children."

Keith Stanovich describes how parents' dissatisfaction with their children's progress in reading is fueling the movement toward privatizing education in Canada:

> "Parents with children who have trouble in early reading and who have not been given instruction in alphabetic coding will add fuel to the movement toward privatized education in North America. 'Parents Question Results of State-Run School System' is an increasingly frequent newspaper headline in Canadian provinces (e.g., Ontario) where phonics instruction is neglected or de-emphasized. The January 11, 1993, cover of *Maclean's*, Canada's weekly newsmagazine, was titled 'What's Wrong at School?' and featured numerous reports of parents seeking private education for children struggling in reading due to a lack of emphasis on alphabetic coding in school curricula.... It is reported that Canada's private school enrollment jumped 15 percent in the single year of 1992."

Of course, private schools are just as likely—and the elite ones probably more likely—to have embraced a one-sided Whole Language approach. But parents are generally not well informed about the specifics of different instructional programs. They only know that their child is not doing well in his current setting, and they begin to look elsewhere.

• • •

THE WHOLE Language movement has brought to the forefront many complex and legitimate issues about the nature of teaching and learning and the goals of education, and it has brought fresh life to many classrooms. But to the extent that it has reduced decoding to an incidental place in the reading curriculum, it has done a terrible disservice to the children whose lives depend on mastery of that skill. As Adams and Bruck compellingly argue, the legitimate issues related to questions of teacher empowerment, child-centered education, and the reading-writing connection "are strictly independent from issues of the nature of the knowledge and processes involved in reading and learning to read. On these latter questions, the research is resoundingly clear. Only by disentangling these two sets of issues, can we give either the attention and commitment that it so urgently deserves."

And, as Stanovich warns, unless this disentangling takes place, "whole language proponents threaten all of their legitimate accomplishments. Eventually—perhaps not for a great while, but eventually—the weight of empirical evidence will fall on their heads."

We do not have to wait for such a scenario to unfold. We can create a better one—one in which a self-confident teaching profession crafts a well-balanced program that draws the best from both approaches and in the process gives all children their best hope for learning and loving to read.

Lastly, I would like to mention that it seems fitting that this issue of AMERICAN EDUCATOR coincides with the opening of QuEST, AFT's biennial national conference on professional issues in education, an event that has from its inception been dedicated to the belief that, contrary to how some would have it, teaching is not just something you're equipped to do because you like kids. It is a rigorously demanding profession and—like other professions—its successful practice rests on the mastery and implementation of a large and continually expanding body of knowledge, research, and documented practice. It is clear that much of the knowledge base set forth in the three articles that follow has not made its way into the hands of vast numbers of classroom teachers. We hope that by making this information more widely available, we can help remedy that situation.

—EDITOR

Shakespeare and Beginning Reading: "The Readiness Is All"

by Edward J. Kameenui
University of Oregon

Edward J. Kameenui *is Professor and Associate Director of the National Center to Improve the Tools of Education at the College of Education, University of Oregon. He recently directed a study that reviewed and synthesized more than a decade of research on reading instruction and diverse learners. The study identified areas in which the research findings converged, clearly indicating best practices for teaching reading. In this article, he describes some of those practices.*

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As a former English major who has had serious midnight skirmishes with Shakespeare's words and meanings, I can't help but find extraordinary similarities between the study of Shakespeare and the never-ending debate about teaching beginning reading. In Shakespearean tragedies, for example, there is much reader anxiety over good and evil, right and wrong, life and death. However, at a more subtle level, the real tension is in understanding the appearance of things (i.e., what "passes show") and determining what really *is* from what is yet to come or from what "ought to be."

In the debate about teaching beginning reading, similar anxiety exists over good and evil and right and wrong. But once you get beyond the broad theme of good and evil, the real tension is about more subtle and complex issues—issues for which there is no consensus concerning what "ought to be." The absence of consensus doesn't mean that we don't have substantial evidence about what ought to be taught in beginning reading or when, how, and how often it should be taught. In fact, the evidence is abundantly clear, and the debate about beginning reading has unnecessarily left teachers, parents, researchers, school administrators, and beginning readers themselves with what appears to be "the trappings and the suits of woe."

The Appearance Versus the Reality of Reading

One of the major misunderstandings about reading, like Shakespeare, has to do with the appearance of things. By all public appearances, reading looks like a fairly easy and natural thing to do. After all, almost everyone can do it, and in fact, most people read with what appears to be little or no effort at all. Of course, some people move their lips or furrow their brows when they read silently, and still others actually "mumble read," although they don't know it and wouldn't admit it if you told them.

The "appearance" of reading masks the very real and complex processes involved in the act of reading. The technical truth about reading is that learning to read is anything but natural. In fact, it doesn't just develop incidentally; it requires human intervention and context. While skillful and passionate readers look quite natural in their reading, the act of reading requires bringing together a number of complex actions involving the eyes, the brain, and the psychology of the mind (e.g., motivation, interest, past experience) that do not occur naturally. In a recent special issue of *American Educator* entitled, "Learning to Read: Schooling's First

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Mission," Adams and Bruck (1995) stated:

> For skillful adult readers, meaningful text, regardless of its ease or difficulty, is read through what is essentially a left to right, line by line, word by word process. In general, skillful readers visually process virtually each individual letter of every word they read, translating print to speech as they go... More specifically, it is skillful readers' overlearned knowledge about the sequences of letters and spelling patterns that enables them to process the print on a page so quickly and easily. As the reader fixates each word of text, the individual letters in focus are perceived almost instantly and effortlessly. (pp. 11-12)

Clearly, the process of reading, which appears quite natural, is actually intricate, complex, and intentional. More important, while the act of reading may "appear" natural and easy for most of us, for many children it is neither natural nor easy; in fact, it is downright frustrating. For these children, "we have not a classroom moment to waste" (Adams, 1991) as they face the "tyranny of time" (Kameenui, 1994), because the "pedagogical clock for students who are behind in reading and literacy development continues to tick mercilessly, and the opportunities for these students to advance or catch up diminish over time" (p. 379). When it comes to beginning reading, in the words of Hamlet, "The readiness is all." In such cases, the teaching of beginning reading must be highly purposeful and strategic.

Fortunately, the field of reading is at a point in its research and professional knowledge to make strong, clear, and assertive statements about how to teach reading, what to teach, when to teach what, and what conditions at home and school enhance reading literacy development. Knowing these things should allow us to teach reading in purposeful, strategic, and effective ways. The remainder of this article describes two processes and activities—phonological awareness and word recognition—that are essential to teaching beginning reading to students with diverse learning and curricular needs, such as students with learning disabilities.

Readiness and Beginning Reading

More than 30 years ago, Benjamin Bloom (1964) discussed the critical importance of the "early environment and experience," noting that "although it is not invariably true, the period of most rapid growth is likely to be in the early years and this is then followed by periods of less and less rapid growth" (p. 204). For children who are behind in their reading and literacy experiences, the research makes convincingly clear that the opportunities for these readers to advance or catch up diminish over time. Because success in the early stages of reading development predicts later reading development, it demands (in deference to Shakespeare) our "grand commission" and conscientious employment.

The Sounds of Words

The unnatural act of reading requires a beginning reader to make sense of symbols on a page (i.e., to read words and interpret the meanings of those words.) In the case of English, these symbols are actually sequences of letters that represent an alphabetic language, but more important, the printed letters can also be translated into sounds. To translate letters into sounds, a beginning reader should "enter school with a conscious awareness of the sound structure of words and the ability to manipulate sounds in words" (Smith, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1995, p. 2). This is referred to as *phonological awareness*. The research is clear and substantial, and the evidence is unequivocal: Students who enter first grade with a wealth of phonological awareness are more successful readers than those who do not.

Some examples of phonological awareness activities include asking a child to respond to the following (Stanovich, 1994):

1. What would be left if the /k/ sound were taken away from *cat*?
2. What do you have if you put these sounds together? /s/, /a/, /t/?
3. What is the first sound in *rose*?

In these activities, students do not see any written words or letters. Instead, they listen and respond entirely on the basis of what they hear. The three activities require students to manipulate the individual sounds in the words, *cat, sat, and rose* by either isolating or combining them in known words. For some children, performing these activities may be difficult for various reasons. For example, they may not be able to process the sounds or phonemes that comprise a word, because they may not be familiar enough with the word to recall it from long-

Teaching Tips

For teachers of students who have difficulty with phonological awareness and alphabetic understanding, we offer the following teaching tips:

1. Develop explicit awareness of the sounds of words.

Phonological awareness instruction is obligatory, not optional, and it should be explicit. Teachers should use strategies that are conspicuous and make phonemes prominent in children's attention and perception. Do this by modeling the specific sound and in turn asking the children to produce the specific sound.

2. Ease into the complexities of phonological awareness.

Phonological awareness tasks can be made easy or difficult for beginning readers by selecting words to use in teaching that are easier or more difficult. Begin with easy words and progress to more difficult ones. The following five characteristics make a word easier or more difficult:

(1) the number of phonemes in the word (e.g., *cat* is easier than *sand*);
(2) the size of the phonological unit (e.g., compound words are larger than phonemes);
(3) phoneme position in words (e.g., initial sounds are easiest and medial sounds are most difficult);
(4) phonological properties of words (e.g., continuants, such as /m/, are easier than stop sounds such as /t/); and
(5) phonological awareness dimensions (e.g., rhyming is easier than segmentation). Dimensions of phonological awareness include blending sounds, segmenting sounds, and rhyming.

3. Provide support and assistance.

Beginning readers will require greater teacher assistance and support in the early stages of teaching. The following research-based instructional sequence summarizes this kind of scaffolding:

a. Model the sound or the strategy for making the sound.
b. Have the children use the strategy to produce the sound.
c. Repeat steps (a) and (b) using several examples for each dimension and level of difficulty.
d. Prompt the children to use the strategy during guided practice.
e. Introduce more difficult examples, following steps (a) through (d) for each example.

4. Schedule the opportunities and give them top priority.

A sequence and schedule of opportunities to apply and develop facility with sounds should be tailored to each child's needs. These opportunities cannot be incidental or of secondary importance. This schedule must be given top priority and should not be compromised, especially in light of the "tyranny of time" (Kameenui, 1994, p. 394) that children face in trying to catch up with their peers. Opportunities to engage in phonological awareness activities should be plentiful, frequent, and fun.

term memory and hold it in memory long enough to "operate" on its phonological features. Other children simply cannot hear the different sounds in a word, although the problem is not with hearing acuity, but with the nature of phonemes. Phonemes are easily distorted, and the boundaries for determining where one sound ends and the other begins are not entirely clear to the ear and brain.

Phonological awareness activities build on and enhance children's experiences with written language (e.g., print awareness) and spoken language (e.g., playing with words). These activities also set children's readiness and foundation for reading, especially the reading of words. Children who have been immersed in a literacy environment in which words, word games, rhyming, and story reading are plentiful are more likely to understand what reading is all about than those who have experienced an impoverished literacy environment. A beginning reader with successful phonological awareness is ostensibly ready for word recognition activities.

Reading Words: Rough-Hew Them How We Will

According to Juel (1991), children who are ready to begin reading words have developed the following prerequisite skills. They understand that (a) words can be spoken or written, (b) print corresponds to speech, and (c) words are composed of phonemes (sounds).

Teaching Tips

For teachers of students who have difficulty with reading words, we offer the following teaching tips:

1. **Develop explicit awareness of the connection between sounds and letters and sounds and words.**

   a. **Sounds and letters**. The teaching activities that enable a beginning reader to read words automatically and fluently must be explicit and unambiguous. As a first step, teach letter-sound correspondences by presenting a letter symbol and modeling the corresponding sound.

   b. **Sounds and words**. The process of identifying the sounds in words, blending the sounds together, and searching for the meaning of the word in memory must also be made explicit. This explicit strategy can be taught after students have mastered a few letter sound correspondences. Model the sounds of the word, then blend the sounds together and say the word.

2. **Ease into the complexities of word recognition.**

   The simplicity of teaching letter-sound correspondences belies the complexities inherent in moving from teaching awareness of sounds (phonological awareness) to awareness of letters and sounds (alphabetic understanding) to awareness of how letter-sounds blend to form words. Integrating all of these processes can be made difficult or easy by attending to (a) the sequence in which letter correspondences are taught (e.g., common sounds like /a/ and /m/ are taught before less common sounds like /x/ and /z/), (b) the speed with which a beginning reader moves from sounding out to blending words to reading connected text, and (c) the size and familiarity of words to the reader (e.g., *sat* is easier to read and more familiar to the reader than *saturate*).

3. **Provide assistance and support.**

   In general, the support and assistance required for reading words is similar to the support needed for phonological awareness activities. The support may take the form of modeling newly introduced letter-sound correspondences and words, correcting errors promptly and explicitly, and sequencing so that easy reading tasks come before the more difficult.

4. **Schedule the opportunities and make them top priority.**

   Initially, alphabetic understanding and phonological recoding are difficult due to the awkwardness of the processes. Fluent and automatic word recognition that appears natural depends on an intricate sequence and schedule of opportunities that allows readers to apply and develop facility with sounds and words. This schedule must be carefully designed to specify what to review and when to review it, and it must be given top priority.

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(This is phonological awareness.) Beginning readers with these skills are also more likely to gain the understanding that words are composed of individual letters and that these letters correspond to sounds. This "mapping of print to speech" that establishes a clear link between a letter and a sound is referred to as *alphabetic understanding*.

The research on word recognition is clear and widely accepted, and the general finding is straightforward: Reading comprehension and other higher-order reading activities depend on strong word recognition skills. The process of how this happens and the words researchers use to describe it are unforgivably Shakespearean in nature. For example, *phonological recoding* is a mysterious term that refers to an equally mysterious process. Basically, to read words, a reader must first see a word and then access its meaning in memory (Chard, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1995). But to do this, the reader must do the following: (a) translate a word into its phonological counterpart, (e.g., the word *sat* is translated into the individual phonemes (/s/, /a/, and /t/), (b) remember the correct sequence of sounds, (c) blend the sounds together, and (d) search his or her memory for a real word that matches the string of sounds (/s/, /a/, and /t/). Skillful readers do this so automatically and rapidly that it looks like the natural reading of whole words and not the sequential translation of letters into sounds and sounds into words.

Mastering the prerequisites for word recognition may be enough for many children to make the link between the written word and its meaning with little guidance. For some children, however, more explicit teaching of word recognition is necessary. While it is natural for beginning readers to struggle with the print, as Chall (cited in Juel, 1991) pointed out, "[B]eginners... have to know about the print in order to leave the print." In fact, it is natural for beginning readers to become "glued to print" in translation from reading individual letter-sound correspondences to word recognition.

Conclusion

Reading as a process is fundamentally more than it appears to be. What comes naturally to most children is obviously more than the sum of its parts, but the parts are notoriously intricate, complex, and absolutely essential to the whole of reading. When reading does not come naturally to some children, then the parts must be taught, and the teaching must be strategic, intentional, and passionate. As an undergraduate English literature major, I was taught to attend to words. The words were all, and the right words in the right place made the difference between James Joyce, Emily Dickinson, Euripides, and Shakespeare. There is no way to get at the meaning the Bard intended without first getting at the words. All children should experience the joy and passion of reading Shakespeare, but it does not come naturally. The teaching of reading is of supreme importance.

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Glossary

Alphabetic awareness—awareness of letters and sounds and the correspondence of spoken sounds to the written alphabet.

Alphabetic understanding—the "mapping of print to speech" that establishes a clear link between a letter and a sound.

Phoneme—the smallest discernible unit of sound. There are 44 phonemes in the English language, including /th/.

Phonological awareness—awareness that words are composed of separate sounds, or *phonemes*.

Phonological recoding—the process through which a reader accesses the meaning of a word in memory. The reader must translate the written word into its sounds, remember the correct sequence of sounds, blend the sounds together, and search his or her memory for a real word that matches the string of sounds.

Scaffolding—providing lots of direct instructional support at the beginning of a learning process and gradually reducing the support as the student learns more about the subject. The ultimate goal is that the student will need no further support because he or she will be able to study the subject independently.

For more information about beginning reading instruction for students with learning disabilities, contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education at 800/328-0272.